

LECTURE 16: FILIPINO CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND HEALTH CARE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN HEALTH EDUCATION

Culture is the lens through which people interpret health, illness, and healing. In the Philippines, a country of over 7,000 islands and diverse ethnolinguistic groups, culture deeply shapes how individuals and families perceive health and engage with healthcare systems.

Quote for Reflection:

"In our families, we first learn the meanings of health, illness, and care."

Understanding Filipino cultural values and health beliefs is not simply about knowledge—it's about cultivating respect, trust, and effective communication with our clients. As future nurses, your role as educators requires cultural humility and sensitivity.

1. Filipino Cultural Characteristics and Their Impact on Health

Filipino society is shaped by a unique blend of Malay, Spanish, American, and indigenous influences, creating distinct cultural traits that impact health behaviors.

A. Collectivism and Strong Family Ties

- The family is the core decision-making unit.
- Health decisions, even personal ones, are discussed collectively.
- **Example:** Family members accompany patients to hospital visits and have input on treatment choices.

B. Pakikisama (Smooth Interpersonal Relationships)

- Maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict are valued.
- Patients may agree outwardly with health advice even if they don't intend to follow it to avoid confrontation.
- **Nursing Consideration:** Use non-confrontational, supportive teaching methods.

C. Hiya (Sense of Shame or Modesty)

- Individuals may withhold information or delay seeking care due to embarrassment.
- Particularly affects discussions around reproductive health, mental health, and sexually transmitted infections.
- **Example:** Women may delay breast examinations due to shyness.

D. Utang na Loob (Debt of Gratitude)

- Deep gratitude is shown towards those who help, including healthcare providers.
- While this fosters trust, it can also result in unrealistic expectations of nurses or demands for personal favors.

E. Fatalism (Bahala na or "Come What May" Attitude)

- A belief in destiny, divine will, or fate influencing health outcomes.
- May lead to passive acceptance of illness or avoidance of preventive care.
- **Example:** Some delay medical care, relying on the belief that "God will take care of it."

F. Respect for Elders and Authority Figures

- Elders have significant influence over health beliefs and family decisions.
- Nurses are viewed as authority figures, but they must engage elders to gain trust.

- **Tip:** Address elders first when providing family health education.

2. Filipino Health Care Beliefs and Traditional Practices

A. Traditional Health Practices

- **Herbal Medicine:**
 - *Lagundi* (cough remedy)
 - *Sambong* (diuretic, anti-hypertension)
 - *Tanglad* (lemongrass for fever)
 - **Nursing Role:** Validate safe herbal use, correct harmful practices.
- **Folk Healing Practices:**
 - *Albularyo* (folk healer using herbs, prayers, rituals)
 - *Hilot* (traditional massage therapy)
 - *Faith Healing* involving religious leaders
- **Spiritual Protection Rituals:**
 - Use of *anting-anting* (amulets), *pagpag* after funerals to avoid bad spirits.

B. Common Health Beliefs

- Illness attributed to supernatural causes (kulam, bati, usog).
- Health seen as a balance of *init* (hot) and *lamig* (cold).
- **Postpartum practices:** Avoid cold baths, hot compresses to restore balance.

C. Religious Influences on Health

- Strong Catholic faith: prayers, novenas, pilgrimage to healing sites.
- Faith in miraculous healing (e.g., Quiapo's Black Nazarene).
- **Nursing Strategy:** Integrate spiritual support, respect religious expressions.

D. Barriers to Western Medical Care

- Financial limitations
- Fear or mistrust of hospitals
- Preference for home remedies before consulting professionals
- Language barriers or health literacy gaps

3. Cultural Sensitivity in Health Education for Filipinos

Effective health education requires culturally tailored strategies. Nurses must respect cultural beliefs while providing evidence-based information.

A. Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Show respect and humility; avoid being dismissive.
- Engage family members, especially elders.
- Validate helpful traditional practices.
- Explain scientific concepts using simple, relatable language.
- Consider religious and spiritual beliefs.

B. Practical Strategies for Nurses

- Build rapport before providing health education.
- Use layman's terms, visual aids, or interpreters if needed.
- Involve community leaders or respected individuals.
- Acknowledge cultural beliefs, correct misconceptions gently.
- Assess readiness to learn and health literacy levels.

C. Case Application

Scenario: A mother refuses vaccines believing they cause weakness.

Nursing Approach:

- Engage family discussion; address misconceptions respectfully.
- Provide clear, relatable information about vaccine benefits.
- Respect religious beliefs while advocating for child health.

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